



# RURAL COMPANIES EXPAND THEIR SALES HORIZONS WITH THE RURAL EXPORT INITIATIVE

by Amy Klemt

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Small businesses in rural areas like Somerset, Kentucky and Alamogordo, New Mexico face challenges unknown to metropolitan businesses. The inevitable ups and downs of the business cycle create big worries for rural businesses whose access to large markets may be limited. Here's a tip for those rural businesses: there are great markets for your products and services overseas.

Why don't more rural businesses export? Rural areas often lack the resources available to most urban businesses, and their access to banking and shipping centers may be limited as well. The U.S. Commercial Service's Rural Export Initiative opens new doors for rural U.S. companies by providing them with better access to export assistance and global market research. Through this initiative, the U.S. Commercial Service is increasing the number of rural companies, who successfully enter or expand their presence in international markets.

Exporting is by no means as simple as selling to customers in your own backyard. Rural U.S. business owners need to carefully target the best markets for their products and then be prepared to deal with cultural differences, unfamiliar labeling standards, customs issues and a host of other challenges. Assistance navigating the process of

making their first international sale can make a world of difference to a small, rural company. That's where the U.S. Commercial Service and its network of U.S. Export Assistance Centers come in.

Commerce Department experts say a little help can go a long way. International Trade Specialists like Sandra Munsey in Somerset, Kentucky support U.S. businesses in rural areas through seminars, counseling, and on-site visits. "Many rural businesses have never considered exporting, partly because they have limited access to important resources such as freight forwarders, international bankers and attorneys, and other export services available in more densely populated areas. In many cases we're the only game in town for rural businesses and we give them equal footing with their competitors in metropolitan areas," says Munsey.

A team of U.S. Commercial Service trade specialists, focused specifically on the needs of rural businesses, sponsors numerous seminars, conferences, and trade events across the country. International Trade Specialists from the network of U.S. Export Assistance Centers comprise the Rural Export Initiative team. Eighteen U.S. Export Assistance Centers are currently located in rural areas.

The Rural Export Initiative team coordinates a variety of programs around the country with direct benefits for rural companies or communities. Sandra Necessary, a trade specialist in the Santa Fe U.S. Export Assistance Center, organizes and supports numerous export programs throughout New Mexico, southern Colorado, and west Texas for her predominantly rural client base. "I've found that it pays to enlist the help of



(L to R) Ken Romero, Darcy Kallastewa, Andrew Thomas, Juanita Senoia, and Kenneth Johnson all participated in the video conference to Milan and the CHIBI Jewelry show in January of this year.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Commercial Service

local partners such as Chambers of Commerce, business organizations, and state tourism agencies for rural export programs," says Necessary. An upcoming series of workshops in eight rural New Mexico and Colorado cities, "New Mexico Really Rural Program," will train local partners to better assist local businesses in the export process. "Last year, the workshops focused on providing local businesspeople with new exporting tools and resources, but we found that it is much more effective to 'train the trainers.' The upcoming workshops will allow the local business organizations to continue providing the needed export assistance long after the workshop is over," Necessary says.

Necessary has also provided extensive export assistance to the large Native American community in New Mexico through a variety of programs. The Rural Export Initiative team works with Native American communities in many states to introduce these communities to the benefits of international trade. Seminars and trade events highlighting Native American arts and crafts have successfully provided opportunities to display Native American jewelry, crafts, and artwork. Through these programs, Native Americans are finding markets for their products and receiving training in international business procedures and marketing.

Recently, Necessary enabled five Native American artisans to display their products in Milan at CHIBI, the largest European jewelry show, without even leaving New Mexico. How? Via a videoconference with Milan, each of the artisans presented samples of their products and discussed the cultural influences on their work, as show attendees in Milan gathered to watch.

Necessary also organizes the international component of the Annual Native American Tourism Conference. Last year, two U.S. Commercial Service trade experts from Germany and Japan held exporting workshops at the conference.

International buyer delegations participated in the workshops and participated in one-on-one matchmaking meetings with the Native American exporters at the conference.

The Rural Export Initiative team and other U.S. Commercial Service trade specialists support rural companies at trade shows around the country, providing export counseling and conducting matchmaking meetings and events. Trade specialists also accompany or represent rural companies at trade shows overseas, accompany trade missions, enable rural businesses to meet with visiting U.S. Commercial Service overseas trade experts, work with rural media to increase awareness, and develop web-casts on current, timely issues for companies in rural areas. Electronic-based programs such as web-casts and videoconferences are often employed as cost-effective methods of breaking distance barriers. Although some rural companies lack access to the equipment needed for electronic outreach, it remains a valuable tool for many rural areas.

Rural businesses may be hesitant about exporting at first, but Rural Export Initiative programs yield results in rural areas. The majority of the rural companies the U.S. Commercial Service works with are small and new to exporting. The trade specialist's first task is to convince the company that no business is too small to export, a common misconception in rural areas.

Trade specialists develop a close working relationship with rural clients, whose lack of resources often lead them to rely more on the U.S. Commercial Service for assistance than clients in more urban areas. U.S. Commercial Service support gives rural businesses the confidence they need to venture into new international markets, explains Munsey. "Our rural clients know they can always turn to us with questions or problems and if we can't help, we'll refer them to someone who can. Most rural businesses are

very appreciative that a trade specialist representing the U.S. government will travel, sometimes hundreds of miles, to their business just to offer assistance."

Often rural businesses timid about jumping into the export process change their tune after they make their first international sale. Rural companies enjoy higher rates of growth and increased profitability for their businesses when they tap into new markets they never even imagined. As long as there are rural companies to turn into export believers, the U.S. Commercial Service, through the Rural Export Initiative, will continue to spread its message of export opportunity. ■

#### UPCOMING RURAL EXPORT INITIATIVE EVENTS

**New Mexico Really Rural Program**  
Upcoming series of exporting workshops to train local business partners to enable them to provide export assistance to nearby rural businesses.

Durango, CO; Gallup, NM; Los Alamos, NM; Taos, NM; Las Vegas, NM; Alamogordo, NM; and Roswell, NM

**Andean Countries Senior Commercial Officer Multi-State Conference & Tour**  
A four-city outreach event, featuring U.S. Commercial Service Senior Commercial Officers from Venezuela, Columbia, Peru, and Ecuador, aimed at elevating U.S. business awareness of the Andean markets. A web-cast production will be developed from this event to further reach rural communities nationwide. Little Rock, AR; Dallas, TX; Austin, TX; and New Orleans, LA May 13-17, 2002

**Rural Colorado Video Market Briefing Series** —The first part of a four-part series of the "Western Slope Video-Conference Market Briefing Series On The Rural Colorado Western Slope" took place April 1, 2002.

Three future sessions are planned. "Doing Business in China" — May 17, 2002, "Doing Business in the EU" — June 12, 2002 and "E-Commerce" - September 11, 2002.